

Living like a Roman Emperor: the Stoic Life¹

26th November – 3rd December, 2012

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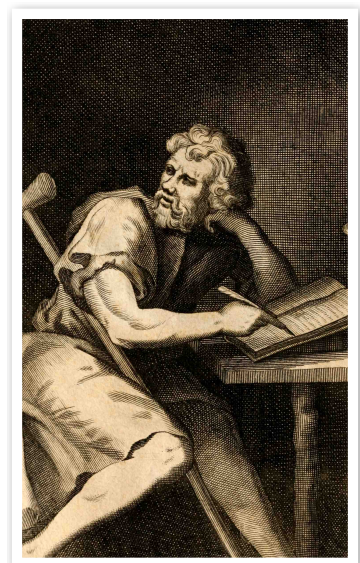
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¹ **N.B.** The contents of this handbook are not intended as a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Any person with a condition requiring medical attention should consult a qualified medical practitioner or suitable therapist. This experiment is not suitable for anyone who is suffering from psychosis, personality disorder, clinical depression, PTSD, or other severe mental health problems. Undertaking this trial shall be taken to be an acknowledgement by the participant that he/she is aware of and accepts responsibility in relation to the foregoing.

² Contributors to Booklet: Gill Garratt, therapist (CBT/REBT), author of *Introducing CBT for Work* (**GG**), Christopher Gill, Professor of Ancient Thought, University of Exeter (**CG**), Psychotherapist, Philosophical Counsellor and author of *Wise Therapy* (**TIB**), Donald Robertson, CBT and Author on Links between Stoicism and CBT (**DR**), John Sellars, Senior Lecturer of Philosophy, Birkbeck College London (**JS**), Patrick Ussher, PhD Student on Stoicism, University of Exeter (**PU**), Sophie Deal (cartoons), Rob O'Connor [art designs], Mary Redmond ['following nature' picture] and students of Roman Philosophy at the University of Exeter. All contributions are copyright © to respective authors.

Introduction: Making the Most of the ‘Living like a Stoic’ Experiment

TIB

Welcome to this opportunity to take part in a unique experiment, to follow the two millennia old *Stoic Philosophy as a Way of Life* in the modern-day! This project stems from a recent workshop, between academics and psychotherapists, at the University of Exeter (U.K.) held in October 2012, the goal of which was to explore possible adaptations of Stoicism for the modern-day. This Stoic week is part of that project, a week which **you** are invited to join.

In this booklet, you will find guidance on how to adapt and follow Stoic principles, with a combination of general theory and more specific, step-by-step guidance on certain Stoic exercises. Take your time to familiarize yourself with the general theory, and reflect on how this could relate to the next week. Then look more closely at the sections on *prosoche*, working well, the daily itinerary, specific exercises, and reflect on how you can implement these in your normal day to day activities. Throughout the booklet, you will find prompts here and there (always beginning with ‘**pre-week reflection**’) to help you reflect on the implications of each section for your own life.

These materials have been prepared by experts in the field and give you an unusual, and free, chance for personal development. You may be full of excitement about this prospect and be 100% confident that you will make full use of this opportunity without further guidance. If that is the case, then there is no need to read any more of this section. If, however, you are human and not yet a fully developed Stoic sage, you may have some doubts, either about the potential benefits of doing the work or of your ability to follow it through. If that is the case, then read on for an *FAQ* which you might find helpful:

Q: How do I know that living like a Stoic will benefit me?

A: You don't. Indeed, one of the reasons we are conducting the experiment is to find out whether, and how, Stoic practices can help us to live better. All we can say is that some people have found some of the exercises and readings worthwhile. The benefit for you may be educational - in understanding what Stoicism is about - it may be psychological - helping you become more resilient and possibly even happier - it may be moral - you may find that the week helps you develop certain desirable ethical qualities. Or you may find that Stoicism is one philosophy that isn't for you, which might in itself be a valuable thing to learn.

Q: I'm worried I may not have time to do everything. How can I give myself the best chance of making the most of it?

A: It will probably be helpful for you to think of this as a definite, short-term commitment - similar perhaps to the effort you would put in to rehearsing the week before appearing in a play, or an exam, or training for a sporting event. As with those commitments, it's essential for you to make time for the additional activities. For

example, you might like to set aside half an hour at the beginning and end of each day specifically for Stoicism this week.

One advantage you have over the ancient Stoics is that you can use modern technology. How many ways can you think of in which modern technology could help you live like a Stoic. Here are some ideas:

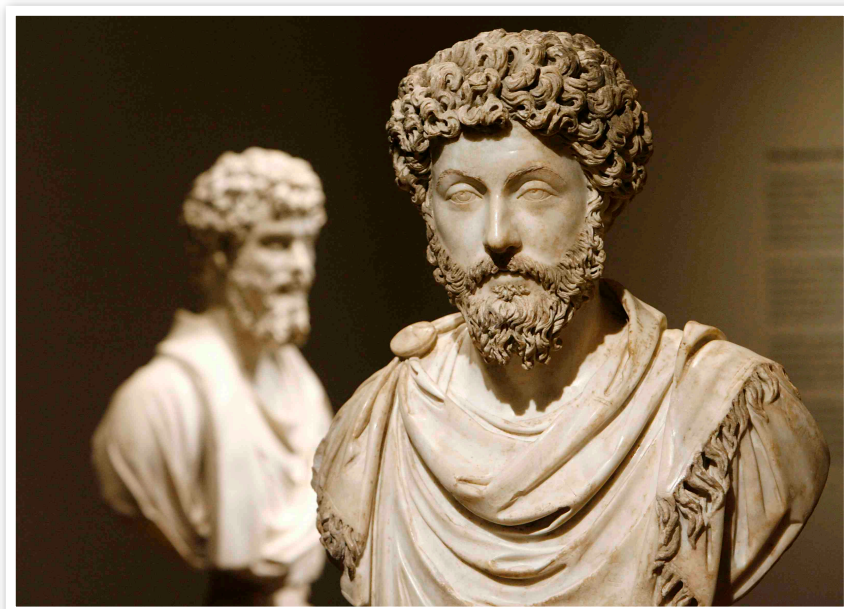
- * Record a video diary of your experiences of living like a Stoic - then, if you want, post it to YouTube or the Stoic blog
- * Record your experiences on Facebook
- * Tweet about your experiences, or tweet Stoic adages as you go along.
- * Each day summarise what you have learnt as a tweet
- * Use your phone a reminder to start your Stoic practices

Which of these appeal to you? How many other ways can you use technology to help you live like a Stoic? If you are doing the experiment with other people, it might help to discuss your experiences each day. Perhaps you could have a 10 minute Stoic coffee each day where you touch base with how you are doing. If you are not geographically close to other participants, you might use the Stoic blog to connect with others, and indeed there will be opportunities to post on the blog daily about how the week is going and to post any general reflections, or quotations from Stoicism which you particularly find useful.

Q: How will I know whether it has helped or not?

A: You will have the opportunity to fill in questionnaires before and after the week which will help you see objective measures of change and also allow you to reflect on the experience. Your doing so will also help us to evaluate the benefits and limitations of Stoic practices. In Stoic terms, you could say participation in the experiment can be seen as part of living a good life.

N.B. All who follow this trial are warmly encouraged to submit their results (see [Appendix](#) for how to do this). This data will be analyzed by a team of psychotherapists. All those who complete all surveys will be automatically entered into prize draw for a signed copy of Jules Evans' *Philosophy for Life and other Dangerous Situations*. You are, in addition, encouraged to post how the week is going on the blog, and any reflections you would like to share [<http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/stoicismtoday/>].



General Theory One: Cultivating a Structured Life

CG

I think one very valuable thing that Stoicism can offer is the idea that we can give our lives structure or coherence. More precisely, we can *all* give our lives structure or coherence (not just special people) – and we can do this in spite of all the problems and setbacks that seem to threaten any coherence our lives might otherwise have.

One way of defining the Stoic idea of a structured life is as an ongoing project or journey towards an ideal that can form a definite target or goal for our aspirations even though it is hard or even impossible to reach it fully. The project can be explained as a combination of the two kinds of ethical development that Stoicism thinks we are all fundamentally capable of carrying through.

One kind of development consists in the way we understand our own objectives or goals. A crucial aspect of this is recognising that what matters – ultimately – is not just obtaining things that it is natural for all of us to want, such as health, material goods, a partner or family or circle of good friends. What matters, above all, is *the way* we set about trying to obtain those things, or selecting some things rather than others, or selecting some things and rejecting others. What matters is whether we carry out this process in a way that, increasingly, expresses the qualities that are fundamental to any good human life – the virtues, as Stoics put it – and which also expresses the kind of rationality that is a central part of a good human life. Making progress on our project consists in gaining an ever clearer understanding of what it means to obtain things in this way and to embed this understanding in our whole pattern of motivation, action and relationships. As Stoics put it, it means coming to recognise that ‘virtue is the only good’, the only thing that is worth aiming at for its own sake. Although this can seem a very abstract and remote goal, it is one that, I believe, we can all make some sense of, especially if we ask ourselves in any given occasion what we are trying to achieve – above all.

Key Idea: *Do we want – above all or at all costs – to get this job, this prize, this girlfriend or boyfriend, or rather to do so in a way that matches, and helps to fulfil, our deepest ideals and aspirations?*



A second kind of development consists in the way we relate to other people. Stoics believe human beings (and other animals too) are naturally inclined to want to benefit others of our kind. But human beings, unlike other animals, are capable of widening the scope of those we regard as being ‘of our kind’ and whom we want to benefit – extending, in principle to any given human being whose life we can affect. Other sections of this booklet (by Donald Robertson) have very useful things to say about this process of extension and how we can put it into practice. This second kind of development needs to be taken closely with the first, especially if we are aiming to give our lives coherence and structure. If we want to benefit or help other people, we need to think carefully about what it really means to ‘benefit’ them, and keep in mind the understanding of priorities and values that is crucial for the first kind of development. ‘Benefiting’ other people, for instance, may not mean providing them with material goods or practical help (though there will be times when this is the right thing for us to do). In some cases, it may be a matter of helping them move towards living a life that matches their deepest aspirations too – in Stoic terms, to recognise that virtue is the only good – and to help them to embed this recognition in the way they live. At all events, it means that we should not forget about, or set aside, the first kind of development in our eagerness to help other people, especially if this risks not really ‘helping’ them very much at all.

Key Idea: *I think if we can take forward these two aspects of ethical development, or even begin to do so, we will in that way give our lives coherence and structure, and one that emerges from within our motives and hopes and is not imposed from outside.*

But maybe this does not sound much fun! Is there no room in this kind of life for parties or celebration? What if our birthday is coming up – do we have to ‘put that on hold’ while we are trying to live like a Stoic? Surely not. Much of the point of the Stoic approach is to shape or reshape how we live socially, rather than requiring us to lead a separate or monastic life. But what we might usefully do is to think about what we are celebrating and why, and who we want to celebrate this with, and also how we can do this in a way that matches the answer we have given to the first two questions. In other words, we might want to mark our birthday in a way that expresses what we really want, in a more than superficial way, to share with other people – and which is also enjoyable. This may not quite match the stereotype of the ‘full-on’ student party but may fit better into the overall shape we want to give to our lives.

One very major advantage of the kind of structure provided by the Stoic ethical project is that it helps to build up resilience against the setbacks – even disasters – that any of us can encounter at any time. Other kinds of structured life, based on more external or socially defined standards, are more easily thrown off course by events of this type. This does not mean that Stoics are necessarily cold or lacking in natural responses, as is sometimes supposed. For the Stoic theory of value, illness or injury or death (your own or that of someone close to you) is something that you are naturally inclined not to want to happen – it is not ‘preferable’, in their terminology. But these things are not the complete disasters that they sometimes seem from a more conventional viewpoint.

For one thing, we can see that these things are not the worst thing that can happen in the world; the worst thing would be for the person concerned to become a morally repellent and corrupt individual, whether the person concerned is ‘me’ or

someone close to me. (In fact, for Stoics, this is the only thing that is ‘bad’ in a complete sense.) For another, a disaster, even the death of a close friend or relative, does not mean the end of the opportunity for us to lead a full and indeed happy life, even if at first it does feel like the end of this hope. It does not mean that we have to give up the Stoic project of carrying forward the two kinds of ethical development outlined here and of working out how these are linked, in theory and in practice. On the contrary, one of the ways we can try to express the qualities that are fundamental for a good life (the ‘virtues’) is in confronting the fact that human lives are transient and fragile, while still giving full weight to the worth of the life that someone has lived. In that sense, the structure that a Stoic life can have is much more securely grounded than some other types of deliberately chosen lives, although putting that structure in place depends on some hard work on our part, in ways suggested in the course of this booklet.



General Theory Two: The Community of Humankind

DR [adapted and abridged]

One of the most common criticisms of Stoicism is that it is an austere and emotionless philosophy, and therefore somehow inhuman. The popular idea of the ancient Stoics is perhaps that they would like us all to be coldly rational, like a robot, or like the character “Mister Spock” in Star Trek. However, what if this turned out to be nothing more than a widespread misconception? What if overcoming our irrational and unhealthy passions entailed cultivating healthy and rational emotions in their stead? Indeed, what if Stoicism placed central importance on love, so much so that we might even approach it from that perspective, as providing in some respects a philosophy of love?

According to Diogenes Laertius, the early Stoics identified specific “good” or “healthy passions” (eupatheia), of a rational type, which are more transitory feelings that naturally “supervene on” or emerge from the virtues. The rational form of desire, called “willing” the good (boulêsis), or sometimes “well-wishing”, appears to have mainly encompassed friendly and loving feelings, such as:

- Benevolence or goodwill (eunoia)
- Kindness or graciousness (eumeneia or eumenês)
- Welcoming or acceptance (aspasmos)
- Love or affection itself (agapêsis)

The Stoics perhaps meant that when we act with wisdom and justice toward others we naturally come to feel a sense of goodwill toward them and to wish for them to flourish and become wise, thereby making of them our friends, Fate permitting (as it is not within our direct control). The later Stoics have quite a bit to say about love and these related healthy emotions. For example, Musonius said that humans are naturally social creatures and that the Stoic therefore excels insofar as he “displays love for his fellow human beings, as well as goodness, justice, kindness, and concern for his neighbour”. The Stoic sees virtue as true beauty and feels love toward others who are virtuous, or insofar as they have the potential to be wise and good.

Moreover, the Stoics were far from being “cold fish”, people who simply ignored or neglected the concept of love, for it’s even claimed by ancient sources that Zeno wrote a book entitled the *Art of Sexual Love*. According to Diogenes Laertius, the early Stoics thought sexual love (erôs) should be seen as a way of developing mutual intimacy and friendship (*Lives*, 7.130). However, most of these passages about sexual love were allegedly expunged from Zeno’s writings by a later Stoic called Athenodorus, responsible for the Greek library at Pergamum, something that was soon exposed leading to a scandal within Stoicism (Laertius, *Lives*, 7.34). Moreover, very little has been written by modern scholars about the concept of “love” in Stoicism, with the notable exception of a scholarly article entitled “Epictetus on How the Stoic Sage Loves” by William O. Stephens (1996). As Stephens puts it, the central problem of love for Stoicism would be: “How does the Stoic love others without allowing his love to become an ‘unhealthy state of mind’?” (Stephens, 1996). To apply the criteria cited by the early Stoics: How can we prevent natural affection or love from turning into a feeling that is irrational, excessive or unhealthy? How can we love others in a way that allows us to consistently flourish in terms of our natural potential as rational beings and to enjoy Stoic serenity and a “smooth flow of life”? Although

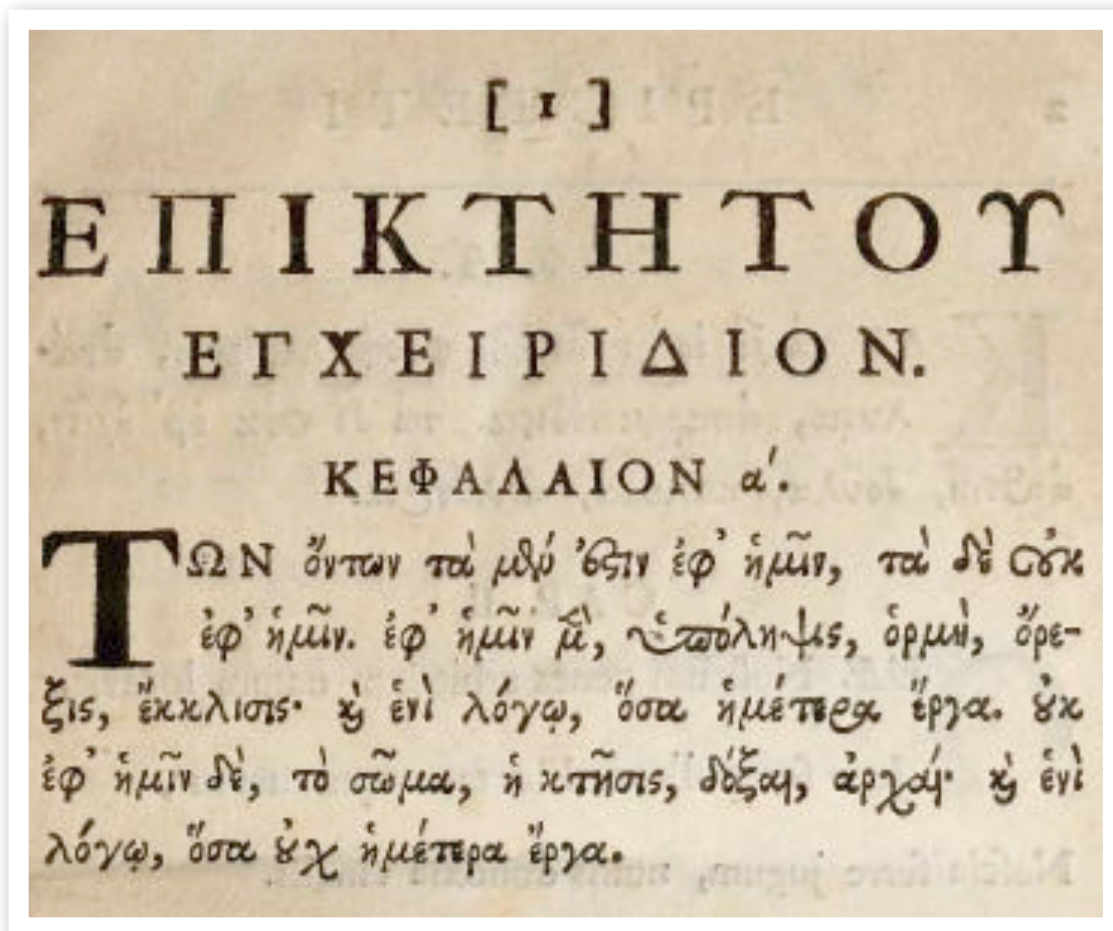
it's not common to approach Stoicism from this perspective doing so perhaps helps to address some of the most important criticisms it has to face, by meeting them head-on.

Musonius said that through studying Stoicism, rather than becoming somehow unemotional, mothers may acquire a deeper and more philosophical love for their own children: "Who, more than she, would love her children more than life?" Indeed, the Stoics were apparently one of the first major philosophical schools to encourage women to train as philosophers and Musonius famously argued that girls should study the subject because the virtues of a philosopher are ideally suited to the role of a wife and mother as well as to a husband and father (Nussbaum, 1994). As we shall, see this natural affection for oneself and one's immediate family is cultivated and expanded by Stoics into the more pervasive attitude called "philanthropy" or love of all mankind. However, this notion, that Stoicism teaches a more profound, expansive sense of parental love and affection, definitely clashes with the popular misconception of Stoics as emotionless robots, doesn't it?

If Stoicism seems overly "macho" or as if it neglects emotions, or if you find yourself defending Stoicism to people who think it's cold-hearted, it can be useful to remember the central role that love plays in the Stoic philosophical system. In particular, the love and affection people naturally tend to have toward their own children and close family (philostorgia) is taken as the basis for the philanthropic attitude Stoics aspire to cultivate toward all mankind. Stoics sought to emulate the attitude of Zeus the father of mankind, toward his children, and therefore to cultivate a kind of family affection, paternal or brotherly love toward every rational being, which they called "philanthropy", love of mankind. The more love expands to include all mankind, and ultimately Nature as a whole, the more rational and healthy it becomes. However, before we can love wisely and in the manner that is truly natural for rational beings, we must also accept the inevitability of change and loss, and that this is outside of our direct control. Otherwise, we are likely to vacillate between over-attachment and anger, as circumstances change.

Can we approach Stoicism from this perspective, then, and see it as partly a "philosophy of love", and as part of an attempt to understand the role of rational love in the art of living wisely?





The first words of Epictetus' Handbook (Encheiridion) in Greek

Guideline: A Day in the Life of a Stoic

DR

In this section, you can read a suggested framework for a Stoic day, a framework which draws primarily on the handbook of Epictetus. Some of the exercises described here will be explored in further detail in the section dealing with askeseis.

General

The chief goal of Stoicism, from the time of its founder Zeno, was expressed as “follow nature”. Chrysippus distinguished between two senses implicit in this: following our own nature and following the Nature of the world. Hence, Epictetus later expressed a general principle at the start of his famous Handbook, which the latterday Stoic the Early of Shaftesbury called the “Sovereign” precept of Stoicism:

Some things are under our control, while others are not under our control. Under our control are conception [the way we define things], intention [the voluntary impulse to act], desire [to get

something], aversion [the desire to avoid something], and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, position [or office] in society, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing. (Enchiridion, 1)

Those things that are under our control, essentially our own voluntary thoughts and actions, should be performed in harmony with our nature as rational beings, i.e., with wisdom and the other forms of excellence (*arete*). Those things outside of our direct control should be accepted as Fated by the “string of causes” that forms the universe, as if they were the Will of God, and indifferent with regard to the perfection of our own nature, which constitutes human “happiness” or flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Following nature in this way, according to the Stoics, is living wisely and leads to freedom (*eleutheria*), fearlessness (*aphobia*), overcoming irrational fear and desire (*apatheia*), absence of distress (*ataraxia*), serenity (*euroia*) and a “smooth flow of life”.

Mornings

1. Meditation

1.1. Take time to calm your mind and gather your thoughts before preparing for the day ahead. Be still and turn your attention inward, withdraw into yourself, or isolate yourself from others and walk in silence in a pleasant and serene environment.

1.2. *The View from Above.* Observe (or just imagine) the rising sun and the stars at daybreak, and think of the whole cosmos and your place within it [see here for guide to [view from above](#) exercise].

2. The Prospective Morning Meditation

2.1. Mentally rehearse *generic* precepts, e.g., the “Sovereign” general precept of Stoicism: “Some things are under our control and others are not”.

2.2. [Mentally rehearse any potential challenges of the day ahead](#), and the specific precepts required to cope wisely with them, perhaps making use of the previous evening’s self-analysis. When planning any activity, even something trivial like visiting a public bath, imagine beforehand the type of things that could go wrong or hinder your plans and tell yourself: “I want to do such-and-such and at the same time to keep my volition [*prohairesis*] in harmony with nature” (*Enchiridion*, 4). That way if your actions are later obstructed you can say: “Oh well, this was not all that I had willed but also to keep my volition in harmony with nature and I cannot do so if I am upset at what’s going on” (*Enchiridion*, 4). (In other words, plan to act with the “reserve clause” for you are not upset by things but by your judgement about what you desired to achieve or avoid, and what is good or bad.)

2.2.1. *Praemeditatio Malorum*. Periodically contemplate apparent “catastrophes” such as illness, poverty, bereavement and especially your own death, rehearse facing such calamities “philosophically”, i.e., with rational composure, in order to overcome your attachment to external things (*Enchiridion*, 21). Contemplate the uncertainty of the future and the value of enjoying the here and now. Remember you must die, i.e., that as a mortal being each moment counts and the future is uncertain.

3. Contemplation of the Sage

3.1. Periodically contemplate the ideal of the Sage, try to put his philosophical attitudes into a few plain words, what must he tell himself when faced with the same adversities you must overcome? Memorise these precepts and try to apply them yourself. Adopt a role-model such as Socrates, or someone whose wisdom and other virtues you admire. When you’re not sure how to handle some encounter, ask yourself: “What would Socrates or Zeno have done in this situation?” (*Enchiridion*, 33)

Throughout the Day

1. Mindfulness of the Ruling Faculty (*prosoche*). Identify with your essential nature as a rational being, and learn to prize wisdom and the other virtues as the chief good in life. Continually bring your attention back to your character, actions, and judgements, in the here and now, during any given situation. When dealing with externals, be like a passenger who has temporarily gone ashore on a boat trip, keep one eye on the boat at all times (on yourself, your character) and be prepared at any moment to have to return onboard at the call of the captain, i.e., to abandon externals and give your whole attention again to yourself, your own attitudes and actions (*Enchiridion*, 7). As if you were walking barefoot and cautious not to tread on something sharp, be mindful continually of your leading faculty (your intellect and volition) and guard against it being harmed (corrupted) by your own foolish actions (*Enchiridion*, 38). All of your attention should focus on the care of your mind (*Enchiridion*, 41). In response to every situation in life, ask yourself what faculty or virtue nature has given you to best deal with it, e.g., courage, restraint, etc., and continually seek opportunities to exercise these virtues (*Enchiridion*, 10).

2. Indifference & Acceptance. View external things with indifference. Tell yourself: “For me every event is beneficial if I so wish, because it is within my power to derive benefit from every experience” (*Enchiridion*, 18). Serenely accept the given moment as if you had chosen your own destiny, “will your fate” after it has happened (*Enchiridion*, 8). Accept the hand which fate has dealt you.

3. Evaluating Profit (*lusiteles*). Think of life as a series of transactions, selling your actions and judgements in return for experiences. What does it profit you to gain the whole world if you lose yourself? However, virtue is always profitable, because it is a reward enough in itself but also leads to many other good things, such as friendship. Accepting that your fate entails the occasional loss of external things is the price

nature demands for your sanity (*Enchiridion*, 12). If the price you pay for external things is that you enslave yourself to them or to other people then be grateful that if you renounce them you have profited by saving your freedom, if upon that you put a higher value (*Enchiridion*, 25).

4. Cognitive Distancing. When you are upset, remind yourself that it is your judgement that upsets you and not, e.g., external events or the actions of others. First of all, then, try not to be swept along by the impression but delay responding to the situation until you have had time to regain your composure and self-control (*Enchiridion*, 20). Likewise, when you have the automatic thought that something is pleasurable or desirable, be cautious that you don't get carried away by appearances, but generally delay your response (*Enchiridion*, 34). Then contemplate together both the experience of enjoying the pleasure and any negative consequences or feelings of regret that are likely to follow; compare this to the image of yourself praising yourself for abstaining from it (*Enchiridion*, 34).

5. Empathic Understanding. When someone acts like your enemy, insults or opposes you, remember that he was only doing what seemed to him the right thing, he didn't know any better, and say: "It seemed so to him" (*Enchiridion*, 42). When you witness someone apparently doing something badly, abandon your value judgement and stick with a description of the bare facts of his behaviour, because you cannot know what he did was bad without knowing his judgements and intentions (*Enchiridion*, 45).

6. Physical Self-Control Training. Train yourself, in private without making a show of it, to endure physical hardship and renounce unnecessary desires, e.g., practice drinking only water, or when thirsty holding water in your mouth for a moment and then spitting it out without drinking it (*Enchiridion*, 47). Withdraw your aversion (or desire to avoid) from things not under your control and focus it instead on what is against your own nature (or unhealthy) among your own voluntary judgements and actions (*Enchiridion*, 2). Likewise, abandon desire for things outside of your control. However, Epictetus also advises students of Stoicism to temporarily suspend desire for the good things under their control, until they have a firmer grasp of these things (*Enchiridion*, 2). Engage in physical exercise, particularly to develop your psychological endurance and self-discipline rather than your body.

7. Impermanence & Acceptance. Contemplate the transience of material things, how things are made and then destroyed over time, and the temporary nature of pleasure, pain, and reputation. View external things as gifts on loan from the gods and rather than say "I have lost it" say "I have given it back" (*Enchiridion*, 11). Think of the essence of things, and what they really are.

8. Act with the "Reserve Clause". At first, rather than being guided by your feelings for or against things (desire or aversion), use judgement to guide your voluntary actions (or "impulses") toward and away from things, but do so lightly and without straining and with the "reserve clause", i.e., adding "Fate permitting" to every

intention to act upon externals (*Enchiridion*, 2).

9. Natural Affection (*Philostorgia*) & Philanthropy. Contemplate the virtues of both your friends and enemies. Empathise with everyone. Try to understand their motives and imagine what they are thinking. Praise even a spark of strength and wisdom and try to imitate what is good. Ask yourself what errors might cause those who offend you to act in an inconsiderate, unhappy or unenlightened manner. Love mankind, and wish your enemies to become so happy and enlightened that they cease to be your enemies, Fate permitting.

10. Affinity (*Oikeiôsis*) and Cosmic Consciousness. Think of yourself as part of the whole cosmos, indeed imagine the whole of space and time as one and your place within it. Imagine that everything is inter-connected and determined by the whole, and that you and other people are like individual cells within the body of the universe.

Evenings

1. The Retrospective Evening Meditation

Mentally review the whole of the preceding day three times from beginning to end, and even the days before if necessary.

1.1. *What done amiss?* Ask yourself what mistakes you made and condemn (not *yourself* but) what actions you did badly; do so in a moderate and rational manner.

1.2. *What done?* Ask yourself what virtue, i.e., what strength or wisdom you showed, and sincerely praise yourself for what you did well.

1.3. *What left undone?* Ask yourself what could be done better, i.e., what you should do instead next time if a similar situation occurs.

2. Relaxation & Sleep

2.1. Adopt an attitude of contentment and satisfaction with the day behind you. (As if you could die pleased with your life so far.) Relax your body and calm your mind so that your sleep is as tranquil and composed as possible, the preceding exercise will help you achieve a sense of satisfaction and also tire your mind.

Pre-week reflection: what might my *own* Stoic day look like?

Core Stoic Attitude: *Prosoche* [‘attention’]

Key text one: 'At every hour devote yourself in a resolute spirit, as befits a Roman and a man, to fulfilling the task in hand with a scrupulous and unaffected dignity, and with love for others, and independence, and justice; and grant yourself a respite from all other preoccupations. And this you will achieve if you perform every action as though it were your last, freed from all lack of purpose and wilful deviation from the rule of reason, and free from duplicity, self-love, and dissatisfaction with what is allotted to you. You see how few are the things that a person needs to master if he is to live a tranquil and divine life; for the gods themselves will demand nothing more from one who observes these precepts.'

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.5.

Guidance: If this seems too difficult to implement *all the time*, as Marcus recommends, start small. Choose specific activities for which period you will aim to give your attention, along with the types of qualities listed above by Marcus, squarely to the task in hand. For example, how about choosing a ‘correspondence period’ during which time (e.g. half an hour) you bring to responding to your emails a kindly, moment-by-moment attention? Can you carry out your correspondence free from dissatisfaction and with care for the person to whom you are writing? Can you watch out for that desire ‘just to get the email done’, and instead bring your focus entirely into the *process of doing*? Perhaps you could also choose something easily definable, such as a call home or a conversation with a friend. Can you have a conversation with a family member or friend with care for that person, with full attention? Choose two or three activities per day to which you feel able to bring this quality of *prosoche*, and remember that, just as important as the attention, are the ethical qualities (such as those which Marcus refers to above) which are part of that *prosoche*. Mere attention on its own is not strictly Stoic: it needs to be founded in ethics [see **key text two**, below, for more on this]. If you find your attention wandering during those periods, just bring it back to the task in hand without giving yourself a hard time. Over the week you might be able to expand *prosoche* to more activities, and perhaps build up to five or six activities by the final day of the week. But don’t worry if this is not possible: Stoicism, as Epictetus and Marcus noted, is a *gradual* training. **Pre-week reflection: what sort of activities would you like to bring *prosoche* to this week?**

Key text two: ‘When you have remitted your attention for a short time, do not imagine this, that you will recover it when you choose; but let this thought be present to you, that in consequence of the fault committed to-day your affairs must be in a worse condition for all that follows. For first, and what causes most trouble, a habit of not attending is formed in you; then a habit of deferring your attention. And continually from time to time you drive away by deferring it the happiness of life, proper behaviour, the being and living conformably to nature. If then the procrastination of attention is profitable, the complete omission of attention is more profitable; but if it is not profitable, why do you not maintain your attention constant?—To-day I choose to play—Well then, ought you not to play with attention?—I choose to sing—What then hinders you from doing so with attention? Is there any part of life excepted, to which attention does not extend? For will you do it (any thing in life) worse by using attention, and better by not attending at all? And what else of the things in life is done better by those who do not use attention? Does he who works in wood work better by not attending to it? Does the captain of a ship manage it better by not attending? and is any of

the smaller acts done better by inattention? Do you not see that when you have let your mind loose, it is no longer in your power to recall it, either to propriety, or to modesty, or to moderation: but you do every thing that comes into your mind in obedience to your inclinations.'

Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.12

Guidance: This text shows the importance of cultivating *prosoche* for the life of virtue, and the life in accordance with nature. In some sense, it is not suggesting anything ground-breaking: can you focus on what you are *doing* [whatever that may be: singing, playing, reading, talking or thinking]? The opposite, one could say, of *prosoche* is akin to day-dreaming, a state of being 'lost' in either positive or negative fantasies. Essentially, Epictetus is advising reflection on the idea that *every moment counts*. In line with this, *prosoche* is important in keeping track of one's ruling centre (or *hegemonikon*) and, at root, cultivating thoughts which will lead to actions which conform to the life in accordance with virtue and, by extension, with nature.

Another reflection which *prosoche* encourages. In our day and age, multi-tasking is considered (quite literally) profitable. In addition, the possibilities of distraction are endless, all across the web (and many websites can, of course, be used with *prosoche* too, but perhaps some make this harder than others?). **Pre-week reflection:** for the Stoic week, in addition to focussing on two or three activities per day which you can perform as Marcus would have done [2.5, above], reflect on which modern day-to-day activities (such as use of websites listed above) might 'break up' *prosoche*, and how, conversely, it might be possible to bring *prosoche* to them. An unexpected, but no doubt essential, question to ask in our day and age: how would Marcus use the internet?

PU



Working Well: Stoic Advice for Writing Essays and Work

The key Stoic maxim for working well: *remembering what is in my control and what is not*. Reflect on the implications of this maxim for your own work. Where does it place the emphasis? What can you *control* in your work, and what can you not control? Inevitably, reflection on this might bring emphasis more to process of *doing* the work (which you can control), and remove stress about just *getting it done* or stress about *what mark it might get*.

PU

Specific Advice for Students Writing Essays

a) If you struggle with procrastination, try this:

1. Go and sit where you normally work.
2. You may take anything with you like a cup of coffee, a snack, a magazine, the paper.
3. Do not start writing your essay.
4. Wait for 10 minutes – time it!
5. Do any other activity at your desk but not writing/typing.
6. After 10 minutes, if you feel like writing your essay then you can start
7. If you don't feel like starting your essay then you may walk away and come back later.

b) Planning your Essay:

1. Write out your essay title on an A4 piece of paper
2. In the middle of the page write a word or phrase which is the key to your essay title
3. Empty your head of anything you can think of related to the essay onto the page
4. Use a separate line like the spoke of a wheel emanating from this key phrase for each new thought
5. Look at the 'spider chart' and each spoke – when you think of related topics/ ideas connected to any spoke, draw a 'branch out ' line and add the words.
6. Spend a maximum of 10 minutes doing this activity.
7. Have a 5 minute break
8. Next take another piece of paper (or do this underneath the 'spider chart' if there is room)

and write out :

- Introduction
- Paragraph 1
- Para 2
- Para 3
- Para 4
- Para 5
- Para 6
- Conclusion

Give each paragraph a title/topic name

9. Research paragraph 1, take notes, spend up to 45 mins on this
10. Take a break , up to 30 mins.
11. Research para 2, take notes, spend up to 45 mins on this.
12. Take a break – a big break now up to 1 hour.
13. After the big break, research para 3, taking notes again up to 45 mins.

This plan will take up to 4 hours. If you can stick at it, it will have helped you make a start on your essay. You may take the rest of the day off if you wish, and work on the remaining paragraphs tomorrow.

c) While you Work – Strategies for Keeping Going

Can you remind yourself to smile while you work from time to time? Remembering *the bigger picture*:

Put down this book or electronic device you are reading from.

Sit up straight and let your shoulders relax .

Allow a feeling of a wave of relaxation flow from the top of your head slowly down through your body to your toes.

Look straight ahead, and take in your immediate surroundings.

Now look beyond.

Gently turn your head to scan a wider area. If there are others present (e.g. in the library), can you adopt a basic attitude of *philostorgia* towards them?

Take three deep breaths.

d) During the Week - Strategies for Keeping Going

The Post-Its method

1. Get a pad of 'post-its'
2. Each morning after you wake up, think of one pleasant thing that occurred the day before – it can be as simple as finding a comfy chair to sit in, an enjoyable cup of coffee, meeting a friend, getting a useful email/text/phone call, noticing something in nature, enjoying a programme or film.
3. Write the good thing on a post -it and stick it somewhere in your room.
4. Keep each post it up during the week.



“No matter how much pressure you feel at work, if you could find ways to relax for at least five minutes every hour, you’d be more productive.”

Dr. Joyce Brothers.

GG

Specific Askeseis [spiritual exercises]

In this section, you will find eight Stoic exercises: [Early Morning Meditation](#); [The View from Above](#); [Contemplation of the Ideal Sage](#); [An Exercise in Philanthropy](#); [The Art of Self-Retreat](#); [The Art of the Philosophical Journal](#); [The ‘Stripping Method’](#); and the [‘Bedtime Reflection’](#). Choose two or three of these to practice daily (or more, if desired!), whichever seem most appropriate on that day, perhaps one in the morning and a couple in the evening, or just before bed.

a) **Early Morning Meditation**

The Exercise: When you awaken each morning, take a few moments to compose yourself and then patiently rehearse the day ahead, planning how you can cultivate your strengths (virtues) while accepting things beyond your control.

1. Marcus alludes to the ancient Pythagorean practice of walking in solitude to a quiet place at daybreak and meditating upon the stars and the rising Sun, developing mindfulness of one’s reasoning faculty in preparation for the day ahead. You might have to make do with setting aside a particular place at home for doing this, such as sitting on the end of your bed, or standing in front of the mirror in your bathroom. However, you can still think of the sun rising against a backdrop of stars.
2. Pick a specific philosophical precept that you want to rehearse and repeat it to yourself a few times before imagining how you could adhere to it more fully during the rest of the day. To begin with, it’s probably best to choose the general precept of Stoicism: “Some things are under our control whereas others are not” and to rehearse placing more importance upon your own character and actions and viewing external events as indifferent.
3. Alternatively, you might pick a specific strength or virtue that you want to cultivate and mentally rehearse your day ahead, in broad outline, while trying to imagine how you would act if showing more wisdom, justice, courage, or moderation, etc.
4. Obviously, it would take about 16 hours to rehearse the entire day perfectly, so you’re going to have to do it in broad outline, perhaps for about 5-10 minutes, picking out key events or specific challenges that might arise.

Once you’ve got into the habit of doing this, try imagining greater challenges, difficult people, etc.

For further reflection on this theme, see Marcus 2.1, 5.1.

DR

b) **The View from Above**

Key text: ‘A fine reflection from Plato. One who would converse about human beings should look on all things earthly as though from some point far above, upon herds, armies, and agriculture, marriages and divorces, births and deaths, the clamour of law courts, deserted wastes, alien peoples of every kind, festivals, lamentations, and markets, this intermixture of everything and ordered combination of opposites.’

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 7.48.

The Exercise: The ‘View from Above’ is a guided visualization which is aimed at instilling a sense of the ‘bigger picture’, and of understanding your role in wider community of humankind. You might decide to listen to the View from Above first thing in the morning, at a quiet point during the day (e.g. after lunch) or late in the evening, perhaps even last thing at night. It can be listened to sitting or lying down. You can download a recording of the *View from Above* (by Donald Robertson) at this address: <https://dl.dropbox.com/u/57729041/viewfromabovestocweek.mp3>

DR

c) Contemplation of the Ideal Sage

‘Choose someone whose way of life as well as words, and whose very face as mirroring the character that lies behind it, have won your approval. Be always pointing him out to yourself either as your guardian or as your model. There is a need, in my view, for someone as a standard against which our characters can measure themselves. Without a ruler to do it against you won’t make the crooked straight.’

Seneca, *Letter XI*

Guidance: As Seneca implies, this benchmark is applied simply by using the idea as an imaginary model or source of guidance and asking either:

1. “What would the Sage do?”, or,
2. “What would the Sage tell me to do?”

Epictetus specifically advised his young Stoic students, when facing challenging situations, to check in with their values by asking themselves what Socrates, their main role-model, would do in the same circumstances.

However, in the modern world, it may appear there’s a dearth of such exemplary role-models. We have “celebrity culture” instead. You should think for yourself and choose your own heroes to emulate. As nobody is perfect, you may find that it also makes sense to make a distinction between the virtues you admire in real people, warts and all, and the abstract ideal of the ultimate Sage, who has probably never existed and never will. For instance, you may formulate the pure, abstract idea of perfect courage, although your role-models may be imperfectly courageous but still provide salutary examples worthy of imitation. Which qualities do you most admire in others? What sort of person, ultimately, do you want to be in life? If this is our standard then, in a sense, the concept of “resilience” must be subordinate to it. “Resilience” refers to your ability to remain committed to valued living, a life emulating your ideal, even in the face of adversity, and to re-commit to your values, getting back on course after a setback has led you temporarily astray.

The Exercise: Take a moment to see if you can list the people you most admire in life. Include even fictional or historical characters as well as people currently alive or who you know personally. Try to include examples of people who exhibit the kind of psychological resilience you would like to emulate.

Now see if you can take the best qualities of those individuals and try to develop a written description of your ideal resilient role-model. What strengths would they possess? If this is difficult, just pick an individual to use as your example for now. If you could sum up the qualities and attitudes that make them resilient in a few words, what would they be?

Now make a list of past, present, or future problems that relate to your own life. Beside each, write down how you imagine your ideal resilient role-model would cope with them. How would their strengths help them? What attitude would they adopt? What advice would they give you about facing your own problems?

You'll probably find that in doing this you go back and forth between specific examples of coping with adversity and the general attitudes that underlie them, which should help you to clarify things progressively.

DR

d) Concentric Circles: An Exercise in Philanthropy

Background: Hierocles, a Stoic of the 2nd Century AD, described the Stoic view that we live as though enclosed in a series of concentric circles, representing progressively more distance from our true selves.

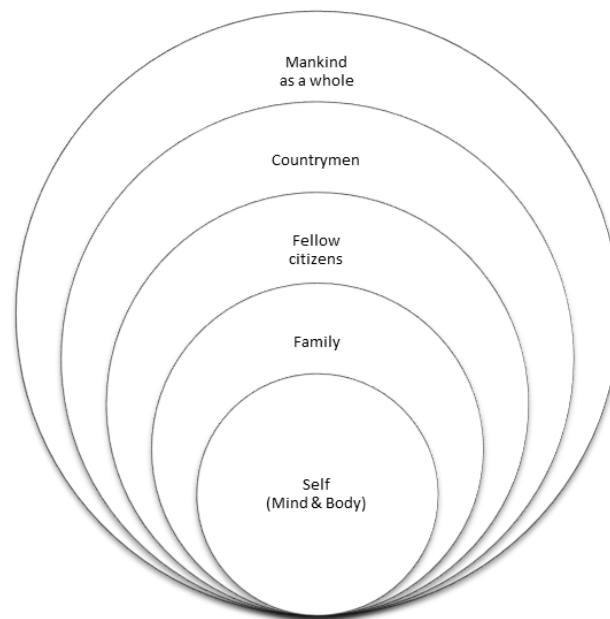


Diagram of Hierocles' Concentric Circles

Hierocles said Stoics should attempt to “draw the circles somehow toward the centre”. He explained that, “The right point will be reached if, through our own initiative, we reduce the distance of the relationship with each person.” He even suggests verbal techniques such as calling one’s cousins “brother”, and one’s uncles and aunts “father” or “mother”. Elsewhere, he says that we should view our brothers as if they were parts of our own body, like our own hands and feet. The famous saying of Zeno, that a friend is “another self” (*alter ego*), also depicts this shift in perspective, taking others one stage deeper into the circle of natural affection and personal affinity. One benefit of doing this, as Seneca argued, is that by expanding love to encompass as many others

as possible, through philanthropy, we actually learn to love in a more natural and rational manner, without over-attachment to any individual that we love. Indeed, he goes so far as to say: “he who has not been able to love more than one, did not even love that one much” (Epistles, 63.11). The Sage is not obsessed with anyone, in part, because she loves everyone as much as she is able and does so while accepting that they are changeable and that one day they will die.

The Exercise: The following contemplative visualisation or meditation technique is loosely based on Hierocles’ comments about *oikeiōsis*:

1. Close your eyes and take a few moments to relax and focus your attention on your imagination
2. Picture a circle of light surrounding your body and take a few moments to imagine that it symbolises a growing sense of affection toward yourself as a rational animal, capable of wisdom and virtue, the chief good in life
3. Now imagine that circle is expanding to encompass members of your family, or others who are very close to you, whom you now project feelings of family affection toward, as if they were somehow parts of your own body
4. Next, imagine that circle expanding to encompass people you encounter in daily life, perhaps colleagues you work alongside, and project feelings of natural affection toward them, as if they were members of your own family
5. Again, let the circle expand further to include everyone in the country where you live, imagining that your feelings of affection are spreading to them also, insofar as they are rational animals akin to you
6. Imagine the circle now growing to envelop the entire world and the whole human race as one, allowing your feelings of rational affection to spread out to every other member of the human race.

Try to interpret this contemplative practice with your knowledge of Stoicism in mind.

DR

e) The Art of *Anachoresis* (‘retreat into oneself’)

Key text: ‘People seek retreats for themselves in the countryside by the seashore, in the hills, and you too have made it your habit to long for that above all else. But this is altogether unphilosophical, when it is possible for you to retreat into yourself whenever you please; for nowhere can one retreat into greater peace or freedom from care than within one’s own soul, especially when a person has such things within him that he merely has to look at them to recover from that moment perfect ease of mind (and by ease of mind I mean nothing other than having one’s mind in good order). So constantly grant yourself this retreat and so renew yourself; but keep within you concise and basic precepts that will be enough, at first encounter, to cleanse you from all distress and to send you back without discontent to the life to which you will return.’

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.3

Guidance: Marcus here challenges the effectiveness of the desire to escape present circumstances by ‘being elsewhere’, in some ‘ideal’ location such as the countryside or mountains. If all he really desires is rest and peace, he realizes, he does not have to *go* somewhere else in order to have that rest or peace. Indeed, wherever he goes, he will still have himself with him! Instead, he decides that the better thing to do is to *be*

differently where he already is. He is able to do this by practicing a kind of ‘retreat’, where he recites some key philosophical principles in order to return his mind to good order and calm. This is also an ‘ethical retreat’, for Marcus makes it clear that part of its purpose is to return to the rest of his affairs, and acquaintances, in a good frame of mind, a clear example of how care of self relates to care for others.

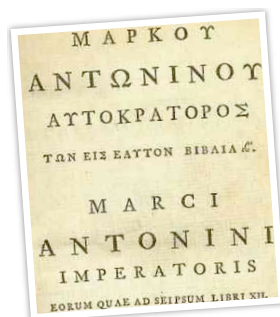
The Exercise: During this exercise, you will need to have memorized some key Stoic maxims in advance. Some core Stoic maxims you might use are the following:

- 1) *May I remember that which is in my power and that which is not in my power*
- 2) *We are not disturbed by events but by our opinions about events*
- 3) *The Universe is change. Life is opinion (i.e. ‘Life is what you make of it’)*
- 4) *Do not act as if you had ten thousand years still to live...rather while you still can, while there is still time, make yourself good*

Try to find a place where you are unlikely to be disturbed for about 5-10 minutes: perhaps a bench outside, a place at home, or at a quiet spot in the library. Choose which Stoic maxim (or maxims) you would like to focus on for your retreat, whichever seem most appropriate to the day you are having. To start, become aware of your surroundings, let them be and then, closing your eyes, of the sense of your body sitting, or lying, wherever you are. Take a few conscious breaths, slowly and easily. At this point, bring to mind your chosen Stoic maxim. Repeat it slowly and clearly in your mind, four or five times. Then, just let things be for a moment. Then, ask yourself:

- how has this maxim related to this day so far? Where would it have been useful to follow it?
- How could it help with how I am feeling right now?
- how could I incorporate its message into the rest of my day, or into the next few hours?

Consider each of these questions for a minute or two. When you have finished, return once more to the phrase itself. Repeat it slowly and clearly a few more times. Take three conscious breaths, open your eyes, become aware of your surroundings and return to going about your day.



PU

f) The Art of the Philosophical Journal

Perhaps the greatest thing that Marcus can offer us is not any particular philosophical insight, but the very *form* of the philosophical dialogue with himself. You are encouraged to try and write ethically-focussed diary entries over the course of the

Stoic week. These differ from normal diary entries in that the task is more to relate what is going on in your life at the moment to an *ethical framework*, and to write from the viewpoint of the latter, rather than just to record what is going on *per se*.

For this exercise, familiarize yourself with the form of Marcus' entries to himself. Then, consider what are the central areas of your life which you feel needs some kindly self-guidance. In writing your diary entry, you can ask yourself: how does this situation relate to key Stoic theory [e.g. one's place in the community of humankind; transience; virtue always being in one's power; knowing what is in one's control and what is not; following nature; and so on]. Try to formulate a response to the situation in your life, which is informed by this (and other, if you so wish) ethical theory. For example, you might decide to write certain key maxims, or a short reflection, which could relate to the situation you are experiencing. The resulting diary entry might be very short, or lengthy, as was the case with Marcus's reflections too.

If you find this exercise difficult at first, try instead choosing a passage from Marcus' *Meditations*, the theme of which you could take and try and apply to your own life circumstances in your diary. Example passages which might be useful: 2.17, 4.49, 5.6, 12.1.

PU

g) Solving Problems: The 'Stripping Method'

Key text: '... always make a sketch or plan of whatever presents itself to your mind, so as to see what sort of thing it is when stripped down to its essence, as a whole and in its separate parts; and tell yourself its proper name, and the names of the elements from which it has been put together and into which it will finally be resolved. For nothing is as effective in creating greatness of mind as being able to examine methodically and truthfully everything that presents itself in life, and always viewing things in such a way as to consider what kind of use each thing serves in what kind of universe, and what value it has to human beings as citizens of the highest of cities...and what this object is that presently makes an impression on me, and what it is composed of, and how long it will naturally persist, and what virtue is needed in the face of it, such as gentleness, courage, truthfulness, good faith, simplicity, self-sufficiency, and so forth.'

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 3.11.

Guidance: If, during the Stoic week, you find yourself encountering a specific dilemma about how to act in a certain situation, or towards someone, or you just feel that a specific or general situation needs reflection, then you can try applying the above exercise which Marcus himself used to understand specific situations, a method known as the 'stripping method'. You can apply this method to many different situations, from how to approach someone whom you find difficult to reflection on aspects of your life in general at the moment.

The Exercise:

- a) Bring the situation to mind.
- b) Break the situation down clearly into *exactly what it is*, stripping away concern for relatively unimportant factors such as personal advantage or reputation which might cloud your judgement of the situation. Make this examination

methodical and unbiased, asking yourself what are the various parts of which this problem is composed.

- c) Now ask 'what is the ethical core' of this situation? What use and value, if approached well, could this problem have in the greater scheme of things?
- d) Ask yourself what kind of qualities *this situation needs*, qualities which you could bring to it, in order to find a resolution.
- e) Set the intention to approach the situation with these qualities in mind.

PU

h) Bedtime Reflection

Key text one: 'All our senses should be trained to acquire strength; they are by nature capable of endurance, provided that the mind, which should be called daily to account for itself, does not persist in undermining them [through improper use of the impressions]. This was the habit of Sextius, so that at the day's end, when he had retired to his nightly rest, he questioned his mind: 'What bad habit have you put right today? Which fault did you take a stand against? In what respect are you better?' Anger will abate and become more controlled when it knows it must come before a judge each day. Is anything more admirable than this custom of examining the whole day? How sound the sleep that follows such self-appraisal, how peaceful, how deep and free, when the mind has either praised or taken itself to task, and this secret investigator and critic of itself has made judgement of its own character! This is a privilege I take advantage of, and every day I plead my case before myself as judge. When the lamp has been removed from my sight, and my wife, no stranger now to my habit, has fallen silent, I examine the whole of my day and retrace my actions and words. I hide nothing from myself, pass over nothing. For why should I be afraid of any of my mistakes, when I can say: 'Beware of doing that again, and this time I pardon you'?

Seneca, *On Anger*

Key text two: "Allow not sleep to close your wearied eyes,
Until you have reckoned up each daytime deed:
'Where did I go wrong? What did I do? And what duty's left undone?'
From first to last review your acts and then
Reprove yourself for wretched [or cowardly] acts, but rejoice in those done well."

Epictetus, *Key Discourses* 3.10.2-3

Guidance: Having considered both of these, the evening meditation therefore appears to be composed of three elements in Epictetus' example:

1. "Where did I go wrong in matters conducive to serenity and personal flourishing?"
2. "What did I do that was unfriendly, or antisocial, or inconsiderate?"
3. "What duty was left undone in regard to my personal serenity and social relationships?"

Seneca, on the other hand, described asking himself a slightly different set of questions, following the practice of Sextius:

1. "What evils have you cured yourself of today?"
2. "What vices have you fought?"
3. "In what sense are you better?"

Presumably, therefore, if a philosopher concluded that he had acted badly or failed to follow his principles, on awakening the next morning he would take account of this and redouble his efforts to prepare for similar challenges ahead.

The Exercise: At night, before going to sleep, take 5-10 minutes to review the events of your day, picturing them in your mind if possible. It's best if you can do this before actually getting in to bed, where you might begin to feel drowsy rather than thinking clearly. You may find it helpful to write notes in a journal at this time also. Try to remember the order in which you encountered different people throughout the day, the tasks you engaged in, what you said and did, etc. You may want to approach this as a way of strengthening your ability to recall memories. However, for Stoics, the most important aspect of the exercise is that you question whether you could have lived more consistently in the service of the chief good, the cardinal virtues, and personal flourishing. Ask yourself the following questions (or questions similar to these):

1. What did you do badly? Did you do allow yourself to be ruled by fears or desire of an excessive, irrational, or unhealthy kind?
2. What did you do well? Did you make progress by strengthening your virtues?
3. What did you omit? Did you overlook any opportunities to exercise virtue or strength of character?
4. Consider how anything done badly or neglected could be done differently in the future [do this without criticism of yourself, but instead of the actions themselves]
5. Praise yourself for anything done well

In doing this, you are also rehearsing the role of a friend and wise counsellor, toward yourself, and that relationship should be kept in mind.

DR



EPICETUS.
107 A.D.—137 A.D.

Afterword 1: The Stoic Art of ‘Non-Doing’

JS

I should like to draw a distinction between ‘living as a Stoic’ and ‘training to become a Stoic’. The Stoics advocated a series of exercises for those wishing to train to become Stoics – reflecting on past behaviour, contemplating potential future evils and frustrations, visualising the world ‘from above’ in order to put present concerns into perspective, and so on – and it may be that fully-fledged Stoics might continue those practices too (in the same way that a fully fit person might continue to exercise to stay in shape), but I should also like to emphasize another aspect of ‘living as a Stoic’, namely *not* doing certain things.

In the *Meditations* Marcus Aurelius writes “Do not say more to yourself than first impressions report” (8.49). By this he means do not make unwarranted value judgements about things we experience. By *not* making those judgements, we shall avoid emotions and so not act in an emotional, reactive way. Instead we shall simply accept what we experience for what it is, without judging it to be good or bad, terrible, frightening, desirable, or whatever.

In the *Handbook* Epictetus writes “Signs of someone’s making progress: he censures no one; he praises no one; he blames no one; he never talks about himself as a person who amounts to something or knows something. [...] His impulses toward everything are diminished” (*Ench.* 48). Similarly, the focus here is on *not* doing certain things and generally doing less. Someone making progress will not do these things precisely because they have stopped making unwarranted value judgements. To be sure, Epictetus often talks about undergoing training, paying close attention to oneself, and various other things that ought to be done if one wants to become a Stoic, but I think it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the ultimate goal, the Stoic life, will be one in part shaped by *not* doing. In order to live as a Stoic it is a matter of doing often the same things that we do now with a very different frame of mind. But at the same time it is not a question of doing more things, or doing different things, but often just doing less.

I think there is a parallel with Buddhism here. Although I think it would be a mistake to characterise Stoicism as a philosophy of non-striving, I think in practice it will be a philosophy of considerably reduced striving, and striving too hard to achieve that may well turn out to be counter-productive. Both Marcus and Epictetus advise us to pay close attention to our faculty of judgement (e.g. *Ench.* 41) but only so that we *avoid* making mistaken judgements. Rather than think of this as a very intense process of continual self-scrutiny, we might also think of it as a process of letting go, of simply accepting what we experience for what it is without jumping to assess it, to value it, to judge it, or to act rashly in response to it. Although the self-scrutiny may be an important part of the initial training, the final goal is, I think, something much more laid back and relaxed – taking life as it comes without judgement, concern, bitterness, envy, or fear. One of the big claims of Stoicism is that our happiness is completely within our own control. Closely related to this is the claim that our unhappiness is often of our own making. The task, then, is to stop doing those things that generate our unhappiness. It is by *giving up* certain patterns of judgements and the resulting behaviours that we shall find the smooth flow of life that Zeno held to be the goal of

human life. **Pre-week reflection:** what types of (unhelpful) thinking or actions could I give up this week, in order to live a more peaceful life?

Afterword 2: Additional Exercises

GG (1) & TIB (2)

These are not original Stoic exercises, but may be helpful additional methods.

1) 'And Rest'

Find a quite place to do this where you will not be disturbed. Switch off any electronic communication gadgets, if you share a house put a 'Do not disturb' sticker on your door, and prepare for a ten minute time out session for yourself.

Step One – Close your eyes. Pinpoint in your mind what has wound you up that day.

Step Two – Say to yourself 'I am not going to upset myself, I am going to relax into calm'

Step Three – Smile to your self. You can also practise an inward smile to use when you are in a place where an outward smile might be out of place

Step Four – Breathe in, counting to three in your head. Take a deep breath, feeling the air flowing into your body. As the air flows through, feel the warmth and feeling of heaviness in your limbs, body and head.

Step Five – Breathe out to the count of three. Focus on the breath leaving your body. Feel the sensation of your body relaxing into the breath as it goes. Think about your limbs, body and head becoming heavier. Feel the weight of your body pressing down.

Step six – Rest.

This simple exercise can be done in private sitting on a chair or lying on your bed. You can also do this at work at your desk. Taking a few minutes to focus on you and being aware of your breathing is a great start to learning to relax.

2) A Meditation to Help Appreciation

Epictetus tells us that: "He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has."

The following meditation may help you adopt this attitude.

Quieten your mind for a few moments by taking a few deep breaths and closing your eyes. Parade in front of your mind a procession of some of the good things that have happened in your life, the good fortune that has befallen you. You might notice personal qualities that you possess, such as good health or a fine intellect. You may recall accidents of history, such as being born in a prosperous age or a democratic country. You might remember some of the positive events in your life, like meeting your partner or best friend. Spend a few moments feeling happy that you have been blessed with these pieces of good fortune. Now choose just one of these good things. **Imagine that it had not happened.** Reflect for several moments on the ways in which your life would be worse. Take a few more deep breaths and open your eyes, more able to rejoice in the things that you have.

Appendix: Information on Scales Used and How to Contribute Measurements

TIB

1) The Satisfaction with Life Scale

The SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgements of satisfaction with one's life. The scale usually requires only about one minute of a respondent's time. Satisfaction with life, along with the balance of positive over negative emotions (as measured by for example the SPANE scale) forms part of Subjective Well-Being, which is the most popular measure used by psychologists to measure happiness.

Source: See https://www.psych.uiuc.edu/reprints/index.php?page=request_article&site_id=24&article_id=491 for more on the scale and <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/Documents/Understanding%20SWLS%20Scores.pdf> for more information on interpreting the results

2) The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience

The SPANE Scale (Diener, E., Wirtz, D. et al (2009).) is a 12-item questionnaire includes six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative feelings. For both the positive and negative items, three of the items are general (e.g., positive, negative) and three per subscale are more specific (e.g., joyful, sad). The SPANE score can be used to measure the balance of positive over negative affect, which along with Satisfaction with Life is part of Subjective Well-Being.

A score of 12 on the "*SPANE-B*" (positive minus negative experience balance)) would represent a high score.

See <http://www.goodmedicine.org.uk/stressedtozest/2011/01/two-new-easily-usable-scales-assessing-wellbeing>

3) The Flourishing Scale

The flourishing scale is a 7 point scale developed by Ed Diener et al. designed to measure flourishing, a broader sense of psychological well-being than that measured by the other tests. (Diener, E., D. Wirtz, et al. (2010). "New well-being measures: short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings." *Social Indicators Research* 97(2): 143-156.). The Flourishing Scale may therefore correspond more closely to non-hedonistic philosophical theories of well-being than the other measures.

To score, add the responses, varying from 1 to 7, for all eight items giving a range from 8 to 56. A high score represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths.

A score of 36 or lower places you in the bottom 10% of respondents.

A score of 43 or lower places you in the bottom 33% of respondents.

A score of 47 or lower places you in the bottom 60% of respondents.

A score of 52 or lower places you in the bottom 90% of respondents.

(source: <http://www.goodmedicine.org.uk/files/assessment,%20diener%20flourishing.pdf>)

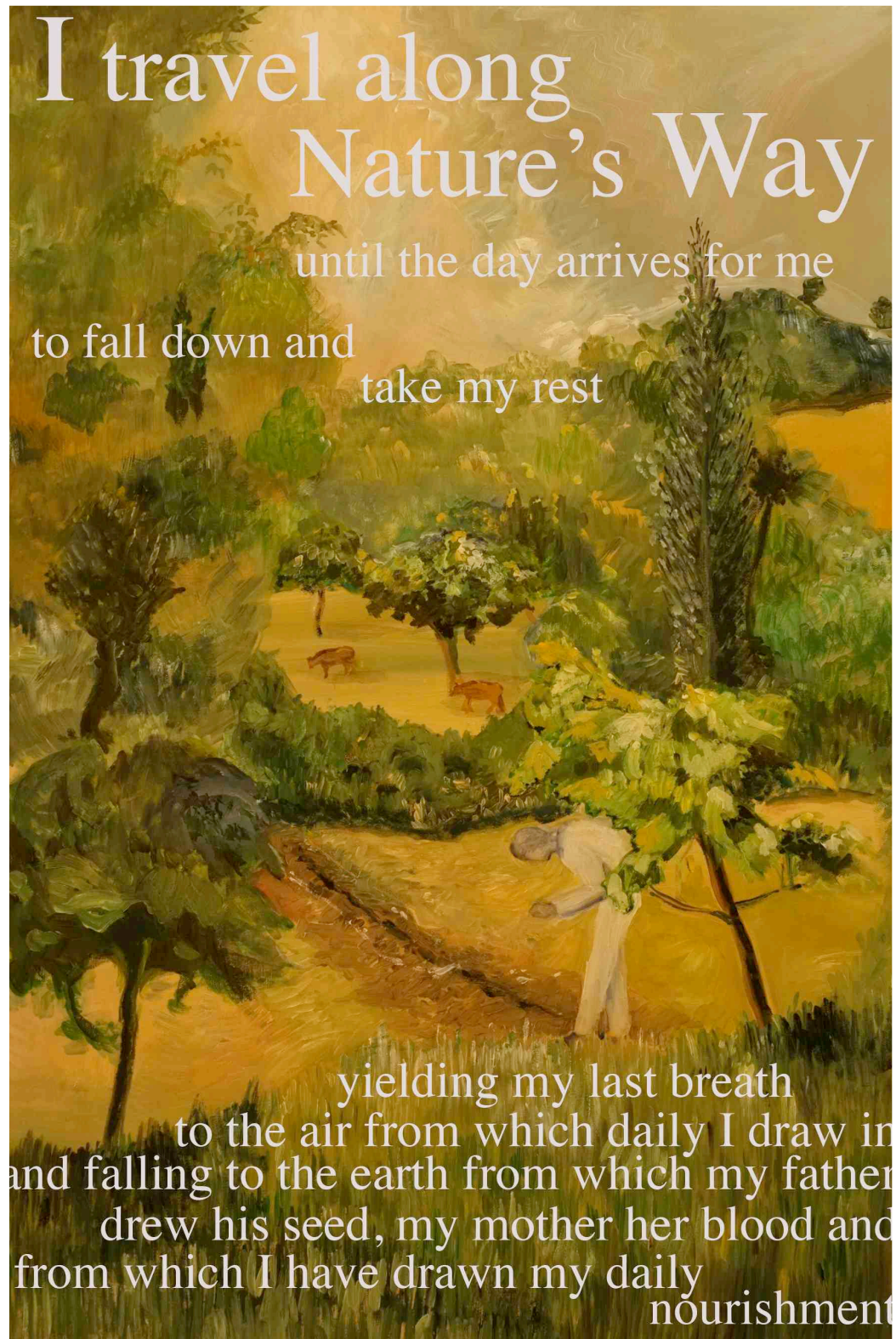
Taking the Scales

If you are following the Stoic week, you are strongly encouraged to submit data for the following scales.

- 1) To take the Flourishing scale please visit <http://eSurv.org?u=Flourishing>.
- 2) To take the Satisfaction with Life scale please visit <http://eSurv.org?u=SatisfactionWithLife>
- 3) To take the SPANE scale please visit <http://eSurv.org?u=SPANE>

Please take each survey once before the week and then again after the week, using the same name (email or pseudonym each time).

All those who enter will be automatically entered into a prize draw to win a signed copy of Jules Evans *Philosophy for Life and other Dangerous Situations*.



Stoic Trial No. 2

Watch out for our second Stoic experiment, next time for *two weeks*, in the Spring of 2013!